

BAR: Proposed site near East Austin rail stop could support a four-story building

FROM A3

er, will not be a typical restaurant because he would lease the kitchen to the chef so that they could each focus on their specialties. Patrons would be able to eat and drink in the bar, designed by Dick Clark Architecture.

He took this idea to the planning commission, where the neighborhood planning team still opposed his permit application.

The planning commission did not approve the conditional use permit — although it didn't deny it, either — and rejected a motion to postpone it, a city staff member said. The commission's lack of specific approval, however, leaves Testa having to appeal a de facto denial to the City Council, which will decide the matter at its Sept. 22 meeting.

In Benz's letter to the city, she suggested

the area would be better suited for other uses.

"This is a prime area for future development of a high-rise, multi-use, office or other commercial property," she wrote.

The site is in an area zoned for a maximum height of 60 feet, or about a four-story building.

The proposed site for the cocktail lounge is in the Plaza Saltillo transit-oriented development planning area, which allows for larger buildings to encourage more density around the transit stop.

The city does not have a stance on cocktail lounges, and the area was planned to allow for higher-density buildings, but "the city can only promote what the market will allow for," said Christine Freundl, city senior planner. "The city also encourages uses that promote walkability."

Testa hopes that plans under way for a

mixed-use project one block east of The Dram Shop will help alleviate some of the neighborhood's other concerns.

A survey conducted earlier this year by the planning team found that a grocery store, pharmacy, coffee shop, bakery and restaurant were the top five new businesses that residents would like in the area.

Testa said he has talked to the owner of a small grocer who told him the empty site he hopes to build on is not appropriate for an urban grocery store.

The Corazon project planned for the adjacent block is a four-story building that will consist of 256 apartments, two and a half levels of parking, and 15,000 to 17,000 square feet of retail and restaurant space, said Dudley Simmons, vice president of acquisitions at Cypress Real Estate Advisors.

Corazon developers have been involved in preliminary conversations with smaller

grocery operators for the ground-level retail space, Simmons said. They are also planning to include neighborhood services, such as boutiques and office space.

Testa has been in talks with the Corazon developers regarding parking. If the Corazon project is approved, Testa's patrons will be able to pay to park in the site's garage. Even without the parking garage, Testa has more than the required number of parking spaces.

Testa's project has been in the works for years, and he is ready to start moving on it if the City Council approves his permit to allow for a cocktail lounge.

Testa doesn't want to see an extension of what some call "dirty Sixth Street" either, he said. He would like to work with the city to change the codes and create a more predictable permitting process for small business owners.